

# The Informal Learning Bubble: Will it Burst?

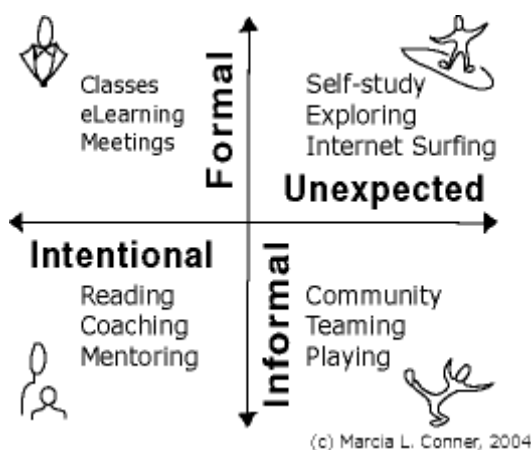
Posted by [Steven Boller](#)

**Okay, so maybe 67.5% of statistics are made up.** Nevertheless, it is commonly quoted that 75% of what we learn is “informal.” (See [Marcia Connor's](#) 2004 article on Informal Learning to see the research on this.) Connor explains:

“Most learning doesn’t occur during formal training programs. It happens through processes not structured or sponsored by an employer or a school. Informal learning is...what happens the rest of the time.”

She goes on to explain that companies invest all their \$\$ and time in creating formal learning programs when informal learning is where companies are going to get the most bang for their buck.

Connor further distinguishes between what is intentional learning and accidental learning with this helpful graphic:



Notice that she categorizes “informal” and yet “intentional” learning as that which occurs via **community, teaming, and playing**. There is also informal, yet “accidental” learning that comes from **self-study, exploring, and internet surfing**. This intentional learning is going to come from blogs, social networks, project opportunities at work, and interactive opportunities (i.e. playing). Social media was just starting to appear when this graphic was produced in 2004. It will be especially interesting to see how **social learning applications** evolve as social platforms achieve increasingly high levels of saturation.

The concept of informal learning is quite the rage these days as everyone talks about Web 2.0's ability to make informal learning easier. **At BLP, we have even launched our own Learning Lab to explore the possibilities mobile, social, and gaming platforms hold for learning.** (You can play “Gridiron Guru” [here](#)) While I myself am excited by the various Web 2.0 applications I see, I’m starting to have my doubts as to how easily these applications will make informal learning EASIER. Will the inundation of social communities cause us to

opt out entirely? Where is the saturation point? As our attention becomes more fragmented, how can authentic “learning” occur? And what is “authentic learning,” anyway?

Many of us find ourselves sticking our toes into the water of social media without making a significant enough investment to drive value. I “dabble” rather than dive deep.

Companies who see informal learning as the Holy Grail that will eliminate the need for expensive, formal training need to think carefully. **Informal learning IS largely what self-motivated people do.** Often, this description of “self-motivated” is not one that fits the profile of people who come to formal learning opportunities. If an “informal” forum exists, a non-motivated learner isn’t likely to seek it out even if it exists. A self-motivated employee likely will...if he/she can find information easily. If various departments and pockets all set up their own social networks – or create collaboration sites – suddenly we’ve created a nightmare for employees who are drowning in information. We’ve bombarded them with STUFF...much of which they won’t have time to use.

Companies need to give intentional, planned consideration to how they want informal learning to take place in their organizations – at least the part of it that involves online communities. One or two are great...there is a huge drop-off in ability to participate beyond that point. The same truth goes with blogs...exactly how many blogs can you keep up with? Again – planned consideration is the key. Creating a bazillion sites and blogs – just because it’s easy to do – sets companies up for disappointment. **Always remember that LEARNING is the goal and all of these tools are just a means to an end.**

As always, I’m interested in views that either contradict or support my own. Tell us what you think of the growing interest in informal learning...and social. networks as a means to facilitate it?

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